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Drive on, Ellen McIlwaine

Rock & Pop

by Juan Rodriguez

Ellen McIlwaine was back in town recently, performing concerts at Café Campus and the Hotel Nelson for a local audience that has taken the singer guitarist-songwriter to heart.

Her very particular talents have yet to be recognized in a commercial sense, although she is a favorite on the U.S. and Canadian campus and club circuit. She spends much of her free time in this city, where she has played with numerous local musicians and was given the opportunity to record an album that uncompromisingly reflected her fine talent.

It should be noted that, despite the ascendency of female pop-rock singers, Ellen McIlwaine has had a hard time being accepted for her own creativity. She's not a glamor girl like Carli Simon or Joni Mitchell, nor is she a wimp like Carole King. McIlwaine's entire style is based on drive and energy, which she uses with a creativity rarely equalled by others — of either sex.

HIGH VOLTAGE

The only major singers who come close to putting out the same kind of brio in performance would be Mitchell and Linda Ronstadt, but unlike the latter, McIlwaine has disdained the use of big arrangements and high-priced session men. She prefers to make the sounds herself and the power of her voice and guitar playing, at high voltage at the same time, creates the sound of a band — a one woman band.

She recorded two commercially "unacceptable" albums in the U.S., in which her drive had to compete with attempts by her producers to slicken the sound. When she moved to Montreal, she decided to record here with producer Bill Gagnon, leader of the Ville Emard Blues Band, to whom the resulting albums, The Real Ellen McIlwaine (on Kotai), is dedicated.

Although it was the musical flamboyance of Gagnon and crew that attracted McIlwaine, it was Gagnon who exercised the restraint in his production of the first album that fully exploits the tonal properties of the singer-guitarist herself.

He sought not to doctor the sound, but to get inside it, which is something that very few producers can do in these days of the recording studio as freakout heaven.

A small troupe of Ville Emardians appear on four of the album's 13 songs but every other sound is by McIlwaine, with a limited amount of overdubbings.

Consequently, The Real Ellen McIlwaine has been criticized in some radio programming circles as an "under-produced" album, because it's not slick and glittery, the disc has been bypassed by promotion men and programmers alike.

ADOPTS

Unlike others who draw inspiration from traditional blues and folk music, McIlwaine does not just pay lip service. She adopts these genres in her own style, with high-pitched wailing and furiously fast guitar strumming.

Not only does McIlwaine deliver the physical goods, but she has fine modulation over her voice; sometimes she lets fly, other times her voice runs on rhythm. Her guitar playing is gutsy, but also possessed of a flair reminiscent of a major influence, Jimi Hendrix. She spices an imaginative wah wah pedal technique with som e tough slide guitar blasts. McIlwaine's dynamic qualities are fully reflected on the Montreal album.

Her own songs are wide ranging, from the laconic lover's complaint in The Secret in This Lady's Heart to a solo sea scene. Let's Go Down to the Ocean ("Salt air a powerful potion/Rolling over me") to spending a Lazy Day ("You've got a reason, I've got a rhyme"). Her lyrics adapt well to her vocal and guitar sprees.

The Real Ellen McIlwaine is not exactly background music. You've got to listen to appreciate the directions the singer-musician is exploring and the subtleties of the "non-production."

She makes the kind of music that grows more absorbing over the long haul.

SPIN OFF

Universal sound

Of all the groups to emerge from the Quebecois rock scene, Toubabou's sound is perhaps the most universal.

Led by percussionist Michel Seguin, formerly with the Charlebois band and a co-founder of the Ville Emard Blues Band, the group's music is dedicated to a concept of universality embracing both the primitive and sophisticated, and performed with a natural ease the jumps the boundaries between rock, jazz and Afro percussions.

Africa is the root inspiration (the word Toubabou was given to Seguin in Africa, meaning "white man who taps on skins") and their first album **Le blé et le mil** (Kotai records), in the company of several dozen African percussionists, singers and dancers at the Superfrancofete, Quebec City, in Aug. 1974. Although a mere two-track recorder fas used, the sounds o fthe white Quebecois improvisers (led by the conga player from Hull) meshed in brilliant textures with the rumble o fthe African musicians.

Now comes Toubabou's first studio effort, entitled **Attente** (Barclay label), in which the fine production quality sheds added light on the group's subtleties, nuances, and downright inspired musicianship.

The album's release this week coincided with the start of a five-week African expedition, in which Séguin and singer Lise Cousineau set about arranging concerts for the entire group for next April.

Meanwhile, back in New York City, the new album has drawn enthusiastic response from the likes of jazzmen Gene Perla, Jan Hammer and Elvin Jones, with whom Séguin has also jammed.

The group is not a one-man show — although Séguin has as unique and personal a style as anybody, black or white, from Africa or the Americas.

His timbres are always there (he built many of the drums he plays), faithful to the rhythms and the hypnotic spell of layers of sound. In this respect, Séguin plays in close harmony with conga player Georges Rodriguez (who came here from Haiti) and drummer Denis Farmer, who is nicknamed "mix-master" because of his tough tight punctuations.

Bassist Michel Dion (who is about to play a two-month stint backing monologuist Yvon Deschamps at Place des Arts) adds warm tones, as does electric pianist Yvon Oullet (who's also heard with Monique Leyrac).

The shining improvisational star of Toubabou is electric guitarist Robert Stanley. His style is both gritty and mathematical.

Attente is a thoughtful album that leads the listener from the feeling of playing music with the birds, trees and wind, to taking off on exhilarating solos and group grooves. Toubabou's music is unique and should, sooner or later, be heard in various places on the globe.

— **Juan Rodriguez**

Most melodic jazz

The New York Jazz Quartet In Concert In Japan is Ron Carter's latest LP, (Salvation).

Since the group, NYJQ, was here last January and the album was recorded in April of this year, the music will not surprise anyone. The high standards have already been set and exposed by the four master performers: Ron Carter, bass; Ben Riley, drums; Sir Roland Hanna, piano and Frank Wess, soprano sax and flute.

The album features two originals by Hanna, one by Carter and one by Thelonius Monk.

NYJQ is obviously dedicated to the most melodic jazz. Their delicate arabesques float like incense. Their polite rhythms drive like a Rolls-Royce. If by chance you think you don't like jazz . . . this album should cure your problem. If it doesn't, then what you like is music.

— **Nighthawk**

On the airwaves

TODAY

11:03 p.m. (CBC-AM) News Special. Live coverage of the opening ceremonies at Mirabel International Airport.

8:03 p.m. (CBC-FM) The Entertainers. Soul singer Isaac Hayes is interviewed by Bill Robinson.

9:30 p.m. (CBC-AM) Atlantic Symphony Orchestra. The Atlantic Symphony Orchestra conducted by Klaro Mizerit in a program of music by Beethoven, Mercure and R. R. Bennett.

10:03 p.m. (CBC-AM) Anathology. The Saga of Lies My Father Told Me, talk by author and playwright Ted Allen describing the history of his short story.

11:00 a.m. (CJFM) People. Host John Donabie talks to Chris Connoll of the Rape Crisis Centre and to a representative of Tel-Aide.

1:03 p.m. (CBC-AM) The Royal Canadian Air Force. Comedy, from the Curtain Club, Richmond Hill, Ontario.

1:30 p.m. (CJAD-FM) CFL Football: Winnipeg at Montreal.

3:30 p.m. (CBC-AM) The Bush and the Salon. The Possession of Esther Cox. A ghost story by Lamont Pilling.

5:30 p.m. (CBC-FM) Touch the Earth. With Canadian singer-song-writers Willie P. Bennett, Bim, Doug McArthur, etc.

6:30 p.m. (CJAD-AM) The October Crisis Five Years Later. A one hour documentary with guests Rene Levesque, Premier Bourassa and more.

7:05 p.m. (CBC-AM) NHL Preview. Sports commentators Fred Sgambati, Danny Gallivan, Fred Walker and Brian McFarlane discuss the upcoming NHL season.

7:30 p.m. (CJAD-AM) The War Measures Act. A one-hour phone-in show with hosts Rod Dewar and Sydney Margles.

8:03 p.m. (CBC-AM) Variety International. (1) Conclusion of the Simon and Garfunkel story. (2) Profile of the late Jack Benny, including an entire hour-hour program from the 1949 Jack Benny radio series.

9:00 p.m. (CJFM) Live Music in Montreal. With host Dave Tollington.

10:30 p.m. (CBC-AM) CBC Playhouse. The Confession, by Montreal writer Josh Zambrowski. The story of a priest who takes confession from a penitent who confesses to molesting boys.

11:00 p.m. (CFQR-FM) Artists of Canada. Bass Donald Bell is Eve Corker's guest this week.

New sprouts on grapevine

Jazzraps

by Nighthawk

If you were to closely examine the Canadian jazz grapevine, you would notice new sprouts springing out all over.

CBC's Jazz Radio Canada (Thursdays at 10:30 p.m. on the AM network with repeat Sundays at 11:03 p.m. on the FM network) might well have something to do with stirring awake the consciousness.

Many interviews of local jazz artists have been aired across Canada throughout the summer and a lot of our musicians tune in coast to coast find out what's happening.

Now, communications look like they're established and now this column is beginning to receive input from Ottawa and Toronto.

There are even rumours of a jazz-letter to cover the Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto area. The project is still in limbo but the need is real and some serious jazz fans are involved. A little more time and the fuse will be sparked.

In the meantime, since Montreal fans seem to make a habit of travelling, I'll pass on some outside news.

Ottawa, which is a jazz desert, has just inherited a live Dixieland band, the Apex Jazz Band, every Friday night at The Bowl and Platter, 123 Slater Street.

The place is a restaurant and bar, there is a dance floor to shimmy on, and admission is free. The band, led by Roger Cramphorn on clarinet is at present using Mick Collins, a trumpet player, on trombone. Other members in the group are Doug Armstrong, cornet; Ron Laight, bass; Marcel Renaud, banjo and Jim Butler, drums. They're great fun!

Toronto is featuring a series of avant-garde jazz players during the coming season. Since avant-garde doesn't have much of a stage in Montreal, here is the information.

A Space, 85 St. Nicholas Street is the place. Tonight and tomorrow see reedman Roscoe Mitchell. Richard Abrams, piano; George Lewis, trombone, and Spencer Barefield, guitar. Oct. 19 goes to Stu Broomer and friends; Nov. 1 to Anthony Braxton Quartet with bassist Dave Holland; Nov. 15 to Don Pullen piano solo.

Also of outstanding interest in a concert Oct. 30 at York University with the Cecil Taylor trio. A very rare treat.

INITIATIVE

Andy Homzy is a busy young man. Pianist, composer, arranger and conductor, he is forever starting more groups, be they big band, quintet, or dixieland.

Homzy's latest venture is to manage to get his 10 piece Sax No End booked into Pancho's, 1442 Bleury, every Monday night. The group will be playing three sets between 9:30 p.m. and 1 a.m. Admission is $2.

Homzy leads on piano; Dave Clark and Dave Turner, alto; Steve Hall and Fred Henke, tenor; Jane Fair, baritone and soprano; Burke Mahoney, guitar; Brien Hurley, bass; Rene Amesse, drums and John Riddell congas and percussion.

The Rainbow Bar and Grill, 1240 Stanley, continues with its firmly established jazz policy. Bookings list Sadik Hakim, Oct. 6, 7 and 8. The Stephen Barry Band, Oct. 13, 14 and 15. Andy Homzy, Oct. 21, 22 and 23. Billy Robinson, Oct. 27, 28 and 29. Trevor Nurse, Nov. 3, 4 and 5. Admission is free, sets start at 9:30 p.m.

Cafe Campus, 3315 Queen Mary Rd., is still jazzing it up with Octobre, an experimental jazz/rock group Oct. 6. The Sun Seal Blues Band is scheduled for the 13. Maneige, another experimental jazz/rock group comes in the 27.

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